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The Origins of Totalitarianism Quotes

The Origins of Totalitarianism by Hannah Arendt
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"In an ever-changing, incomprehensible world the masses had reached the point where they would, at the same time, believe everything and nothing, think that everything was possible and that nothing was true. ... Mass propaganda discovered that its audience was ready at all times to believe the worst, no matter how absurd, and did not particularly object to being deceived because it held every statement to be a lie anyhow. The totalitarian mass leaders based their propaganda on the correct psychological assumption that, under such conditions, one could make people believe the most fantastic statements one day, and trust that if the next day they were given irrefutable proof of their falsehood, they would take refuge in cynicism; instead of deserting the leaders who had lied to them, they would protest that they had known all along that the statement was a lie and would admire the leaders for their superior tactical cleverness."
— **Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism**

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"The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction (i.e., the reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (i.e., the standards of thought) no longer exist."
— **Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism**

tags: communism, nazism, post-factual, totalitarianism

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"Before mass leaders seize the power to fit reality to their lies, their propaganda is marked by its extreme contempt for facts as such, for in their opinion fact depends entirely on the power of man who can fabricate it."
— **Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism**

tags: 1968, adolf-hitler, big-lie, fascism, post-factual, post-truth, propaganda, reality-control, totalitarianism

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"Caution in handling generally accepted opinions that claim to explain whole trends of history is especially important for the historian of modern times, because the last century has produced an abundance of ideologies that pretend to be keys to history but are actually nothing but desperate efforts to escape responsibility."
— **Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism**

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— Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism

tags: elites, politics, politics-language, totalitarianism

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"Totalitarianism in power invariably replaces all first-rate talents, regardless of their sympathies, with those crackpots and fools whose lack of intelligence and creativity is still the best guarantee of their loyalty."

Like

— Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism

tags: loyalty, totalitarianism

89 likes

"There is hardly a better way to avoid discussion than by releasing an argument from the control of the present and by saying that only the future will reveal its merits."

Like

— Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism

tags: argument, discussion, logic, propaganda, rhetoric

65 likes

"True goal of totalitarian propaganda is not persuasion, but organization of the polity. ... What convinces masses are not facts, and not even invented facts, but only the consistency of the system of which they are presumably part."

Like

— Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism

58 likes

"Mass propaganda discovered that its audience was ready at all times to believe the worst, no matter how absurd, and did not particularly object to being deceived because it held every statement to be a lie anyhow."

Like

— Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism

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"The point is that both Hitler and Stalin held out promises of stability in order to hide their intention of creating a state of permanent instability."

Like

— Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism

54 likes

"Never has our future been more unpredictable, never have we depended so much on political forces that cannot be trusted to follow the rules of common sense and self-interest—forces that look like sheer insanity, if judged by the standards of other centuries. It is as though mankind had divided itself between those who believe in human omnipotence (who think that everything is possible if one knows how to organize masses for it) and those for whom powerlessness has become the major experience of their lives."

Like

— Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism

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their implacable frenzy without weapons and with folded arms to dare a no when a yes is demanded. Such a man was Zola!"
— **Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism**

40 likes

"The outstanding negative quality of the totalitarian elite is that it never stops to think about the world as it really is and never compares the lies with reality."
— **Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism**

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"The truth is that the masses grew out of the fragments of a highly atomized society whose competitive structure and concomitant loneliness of the individual had been held in check only through membership in a class. The chief characteristic of the mass man is not brutality and backwardness, but his isolation and lack of normal social relationships. Coming from the class-ridden society of the nation-state, whose cracks had been cemented with nationalistic sentiment, it is only natural that these masses, in the first helplessness of their new experience, have tended toward an especially violent nationalism, to which mass leaders have yielded against their own instincts and purposes for purely demagogic reasons."
— **Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism**

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tags: 1968, 1994, classless-society, incel, nationalism, nazism, the-masses, totalitarianism, trumpism 32 likes

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"Equality of condition, though it is certainly a basic requirement for justice, is nevertheless among the greatest and most uncertain ventures of modern mankind. The more equal conditions are, the less explanation there is for the differences that actually exist between people; and thus all the more unequal do individuals and groups become."
— **Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism**

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"the last century has produced an abundance of ideologies that pretend to be keys to history but are actually nothing but desperate efforts to escape responsibility."
— **Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism**

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"Imperialism was born when the ruling class in capitalist production came up against national limitations to its economic expansion. The bourgeoisie turned to politics out of economic necessity; for if it did not want to give up the capitalist system whose inherent law is constant economic growth, it had to impose this law upon its home governments and to proclaim expansion to be an ultimate political goal of foreign

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That Hegelian dialectics should provide a wonderful instrument for always being right, because they permit the interpretations of all defeats as the beginning of victory, is obvious. One of the most beautiful examples of this kind of sophistry occurred after 1933 when the German Communists for nearly two years refused to recognize that Hitler's victory had been a defeat for the German Communist Party."

— **Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism**

32 likes

"Nothing perhaps illustrates the general disintegration of political life better than this vague, pervasive hatred of everybody and everything, without a focus for its passionate attention, with nobody to make responsible for the state of affairs—neither the government nor the bourgeoisie nor an outside power. It consequently turned in all directions, haphazardly and unpredictably, incapable of assuming an air of healthy indifference toward anything under the sun."

— **Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism**

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"Equality of condition, though it is certainly a basic requirement for justice, is nevertheless among the greatest and most uncertain ventures of modern mankind. The more equal conditions are, the less explanation there is for the differences that actually exist between people; and thus all the more unequal do individuals and groups become. This perplexing consequence came fully to light as soon as equality was no longer seen in terms of an omnipotent being like God or an unavoidable common destiny like death. Whenever equality becomes a mundane fact in itself, without any gauge by which it may be measured or explained, then there is one chance in a hundred that it will be recognized simply as a working principle of a political organization in which otherwise unequal people have equal rights; there are ninety-nine chances that it will be mistaken for an innate quality of every individual, who is "normal" if he is like everybody else and "abnormal" if he happens to be different. This perversion of equality from a political into a social concept is all the more dangerous when a society leaves but little space for special groups and individuals, for then their differences become all the more conspicuous."

— **Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism**

tags: 1968, antisemitism, authoritarianism, communism, equal-rights, equality, harrison-bergeron, homophobia, multiculturalism, patriarchy, race-relations, racism, supremacism, totalitarianism, transphobia

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28 likes

"To them, violence, power, cruelty, were the supreme capacities of men who had definitely lost their place in the universe and were much too proud to long for a power theory that would safely bring them back and reintegrate them into the world. They were satisfied with blind partisanship in anything that respectable society had banned, regardless of theory or content, and they elevated cruelty to a major virtue because

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"The antisemites who called themselves patriots introduced that new species of national feeling which consists primarily in a complete whitewash of one's own people and a sweeping condemnation of all others."

— **Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism**

tags: antisemitism, nationalism, patriotism

26 likes

"The most striking difference between ancient and modern sophists is that the ancients were satisfied with a passing victory of the argument at the expense of truth, whereas the moderns want a more lasting victory at the expense of reality"

— **Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism**

tags: argument, reality, sophist, sophists, totalitarianism, truth

22 likes

"For an ideology differs from a simple opinion in that it claims to possess either the key to history, or the solution for all the "riddles of the universe," or the intimate knowledge of the hidden universal laws which are supposed to rule nature and man. Few ideologies have won enough prominence to survive the hard competitive struggle of persuasion, and only two have come out on top and essentially defeated all others: the ideology which interprets history as an economic struggle of classes, and the other that interprets history as a natural fight of races. The appeal of both to large masses was so strong that they were able to enlist state support and establish themselves as official national doctrines. But far beyond the boundaries within which race-thinking and class-thinking have developed into obligatory patterns of thought, free public opinion has adopted them to such an extent that not only intellectuals but great masses of people will no longer accept a presentation of past or present facts that is not in agreement with either of these views."

— **Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism**

tags: 1967, ideology, imperialism, marxism, nazism, opinion, race-theory, racism, socialism, totalitarianism

22 likes

"Factuality itself depends for its continued existence upon the existence of the nontotalitarian world."

— **Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism**

20 likes

"The most striking difference between the ancient and modern sophists is that the ancients were satisfied with a passing victory of the argument at the expense of truth, whereas the moderns want a more lasting victory at the expense of reality. In other words, one destroyed the dignity of human thought whereas the others destroy the dignity of human action. The old manipulators of logic were the concern of the philosopher, whereas the modern manipulators of facts stand in the way of the historian. For history itself is destroyed, and its comprehensibility

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tags: 1968, antisemitism, communism, historians, history, ideology, marxism, post-factual, post-truth, race-theory, reality-control, sophism, totalitarianism

19 likes

“What proved so attractive was that terrorism had become a kind of philosophy through which to express frustration, resentment, and blind hatred, a kind of political expressionism which used bombs to express oneself, which watched delightedly the publicity given to resounding deeds and was absolutely willing to pay the price of life for having succeeded in forcing the recognition of one’s existence on the normal strata of society.”

— **Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism**

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18 likes

“The effectiveness of this kind of propaganda demonstrates one of the chief characteristics of modern masses. They do not believe in anything visible, in the reality of their own experience; they do not trust their eyes and ears but only their imaginations, which may be caught by anything that is at once universal and consistent in itself. What convinces masses are not facts, and not even invented facts, but only the consistency of the system of which they are presumably part.”

— **Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism**

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“A fundamental difference between modern dictatorships and all other tyrannies of the past is that terror is no longer used as a means to exterminate and frighten opponents, but as an instrument to rule masses of people who are perfectly obedient. Terror as we know it today strikes without any preliminary provocation, its victims are innocent even from the point of view of the persecutor. This was the case in Nazi Germany when full terror was directed against Jews, i.e., against people with certain common characteristics which were independent of their specific behavior. In Soviet Russia the situation is more confused, but the facts, unfortunately, are only too obvious. On the one hand, the Bolshevik system, unlike the Nazis, never admitted theoretically that it could practice terror against innocent people, and though in view of certain practices this may look like hypocrisy, it makes quite a difference. Russian practice, on the other hand, is even more "advanced" than the German in one respect: arbitrariness of terror is not even limited by racial differentiation, while the old class categories have long since been discarded, so that anybody in Russia may suddenly become a victim of the police terror. We are not concerned here with the ultimate consequence of rule by terror—namely, that nobody, not even the executors, can ever be free of fear; in our context we are dealing merely with the arbitrariness by which victims are chosen, and for this it is decisive that they are objectively innocent, that they are chosen

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“...the solution to the Jewish question merely produced a new category of refugees, the Arabs, thereby increasing the number of the stateless and rightless by another 700,000 to 800,000 people.”

— **Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism**

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tags: israel, jewish-question, palestine, refugees, rightless, stateless

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